

A duly advertised Special Meeting of Souderton Borough Council was called to order, on the above date, at 7:00 pm by Council President John Young with the following members present:

President John Young	Councillor Richard Halbom
Vice-President Andrew Schlosser	Councillor J. Edward Hunsicker, Jr.
Councillor Ned D. Leight	Mayor John R. Reynolds
Councillor D. Jeffrey Gross	Junior Councillor Daniel Yocum
Councillor Brian Goshow	
Councillor Katherine Grubb	Borough Manager P. Michael Coll

The advertised purpose of this special meeting was further review and discussion of the conceptual plan previously presented by Metro Development Company for the redevelopment of the Souderton High School property. This meeting was also attended by members of the Souderton Area School District including; Superintendent Dr. Charles Amuso, Board President Bernie Curry, Business Manager Brenda Bray and Paul French from Binswanger Associates.

Metro Development Company was represented by President Michael Grasso, Jack Schneider and their legal counsel William Benner. William Benner opened the meeting with welcoming remarks, introductions and a brief report on the status of the purchase agreement with the Souderton School District. Mr. Benner commented that Metro Development Company appeared before the Souderton Borough Planning Commission on Wednesday, November 19, 2008 and considered the comments from Borough Council itemized in the review letter drafted by the Borough Manager, dated November 19, 2008. Many of these comments were echoed by members of the Planning Commission. They have also appeared before representatives of Hilltown Township. Mr. Benner commented that the due diligence period in the purchase agreement will expire on December 19, at which time his client will be obligated to begin making payments towards the purchase of the property. While no formal or binding action from Borough Council is expected this evening, Mr. Benner requested Borough Council to indicate a general opinion towards the proposed conceptual plan for the redevelopment of the Souderton High School property.

Jack Schneider of the Metro Development Company distributed a two page set of a revised concept plan for the Souderton High School property. Mr. Schneider noted that the revised plan eliminates the prior proposal to utilize the existing natatorium for a private health club and, in the alternative, proposes a three story independent and assisted living residential complex along East Chestnut Street. This residential complex was pushed eastward along Chestnut Street to enlarge the proposed pocket park at the corner of School Lane and Chestnut Street. Consideration was given to alternative uses for the current student parking lot along School Lane; however, they would like to maintain the proposed townhomes in this area, perhaps with age restrictions to address the concern of impacting the elementary school. Jack Schneider also noted that they considered shared parking potentials within the development to help reduce the amount of impervious coverage.

Michael Grasso addressed the question on the potential of acquiring contiguous properties along County Line Road and East Broad Street. His office has made contact with Harold and Bruce Detweiler, who are in the audience this evening and they have also talked to Mark Lipkin. If acquisition of certain contiguous properties becomes financially viable, the interior connecting road may be relocated within the site. The village commercial theme of the project will not change.

Councillor Katherine Grubb commented that the residential use at the northwest corner of School Lane and East Broad Street conflicts with the stated desire to locate a commercial use at this corner to support the surrounding commercial uses. Considerable discussion was held on this point by other members of Borough Council encouraging a commercial use in this location. However, this commercial use should not be intense, such as a fast food restaurant, which will significantly impact traffic.

Councillor Richard Halbom commented on the possibility of considering a business

hotel within the mixed uses for this site. There are some major industries and employers within the Indian Valley region that may provide a market for this use.

Councillor Brian Goshow noted concern with grade changes throughout the site and the potential need for retaining walls. He also noted that the plan does not provide for any preservation of the High School building. Jack Schneider responded that they extensively studied the option of preservation since it seemed to be a desire during the redevelopment planning process. The natatorium was viewed as the only viable section of the school to preserve. Ceiling heights and the series of renovations and additions to the high school building makes adaptive reuse of the main high school building impractical. Perhaps some architectural components can be salvaged and reused within the project.

Councillor Katherine Grubb questioned the basis used in determining the parking calculations. Jack Schneider reviewed the parking calculations noting that they are based on the Borough's most current Parking Ordinance adopted in 2007. He did note that there is conflicting language between the Zoning and Land Development Ordinances with respect to the size of the parking space. The Land Development Ordinance specifies a 10' x 20' space and the Zoning Ordinance specifies a 10' x 18' space. Mr. Schneider suggested that Borough Council consider a more typical 9' x 18' space, which will aid in reducing the amount of impervious surface. President John Young commented that the Borough should avoid creating excessive off street parking demands that result in sacrificing green space.

Councillor Andrew Schlosser questioned the philosophy used to establish the building heights within the development, specifically are building code concerns limiting consideration of taller buildings. Michael Grasso commented that the three story building height was established based on public comments at previous meetings. He understood from resident comments that they would not like to see taller structures. Mr. Grasso further commented that the density noted within the conceptual plan is financially viable for this project. He noted that they would prefer a smaller parking space to help provide more green space.

President John Young opened the floor for public comment from members of the audience.

Pam Coleman, Souderton-Telford Main Streets Manager, commented that the car wash and gas station properties along County Line Road were not mentioned as being contacted. She also noted that Telford Borough Authority is also very much interested in this project since they will be impacted by traffic issues and sanitary sewer service for the Hilltown tract. Michael Grasso noted that he is very much interested in contacting all adjacent property owners, these two properties have not been contacted to date.

Cheryl Grubb, 64 N Fourth Street, expressed concern about overloading the Borough's existing infrastructure, particularly the sanitary sewer system and the storm water system.

Steven Toy, 615 E Cherry Lane, questioned Metro representatives on their anticipated time frame to demolish the existing High School building. Michael Grasso noted that Metro does not want to maintain a vacant building any longer than necessary. The land development review and approval process will take approximately one full year to complete before any formal authorization is granted for demolition and construction. Mr. Toy also expressed concern about the potential increase in traffic on School Lane, particularly to avoid the congestion along County Line Road. Jack Schneider commented that Metro has retained a traffic engineer as part of their design team and certainly traffic issues will have to be evaluated and addressed during the land development review process.

There being no further public comment, President John Young asked each member of Borough Council to express their individual comments and general opinion towards the concept plan.

Councillor Ned Leight encouraged moving forward with the general concept, noting that he would like to see further discussion on the proposed townhomes on School Lane.

Councillor Jeffrey Gross also expressed encouragement with the general concept plan.

He recommended that Metro representatives thoroughly review the draft zoning overlay ordinance and design standards that were included in the redevelopment plan prepared by DePallo. There may be other sections of these draft requirements that should be further reviewed as part of the land development process.

Councillor Brian Goshow expressed encouragement with the general concept plan. He noted that certain traffic concerns will require further evaluation and discussion and he also agrees with taking a harder look at the proposed townhomes along School Lane. Councillor Goshow further noted that coordinating and synchronizing the traffic signal systems should also be evaluated as part of traffic engineering requirements for this project.

Councillor Andrew Schlosser commented that he generally favors the proposed project and encouraged incorporating adjoining properties within the project. In particular, Councillor Schlosser noted that the corner properties at East Broad Street and County Line Road are of great interest to improve the concept plan for this project. Driveway access to the townhomes along school Lane is of significant concern with vehicles having to back out onto School Lane.

Mayor John Reynolds commented that he supports the project. Mayor Reynolds also noted that when considering traffic issues, the current school generates very high concentrated traffic flows. Mayor Reynolds also echoed the comments of Councillor Schlosser with respect to the driveway access for the townhomes, which should be rear loading.

President John Young expressed support towards the project. Infrastructure issues are of concern and he would support less parking to increase green space. President Young expressed a preference for a commercial use at the northwest corner of School Lane and East Broad Street.

Councillor Katherine Grubb commented that the overall mixed use development is a good plan. She expressed appreciation to Metro representatives for their responsive consideration of the prior review letter. Councillor Grubb noted that the Borough should move forward with finalizing the zoning overlay ordinance and design standards to provide clear direction to Metro as they begin developing the formal land development plans for this project.

Councillor Richard Halbom commented that he has received positive feedback about Metro Development Company and is very much in favor of encouraging this project to move forward.

Councillor Edward Hunsicker, Jr., expressed support of the conceptual plan and is pleased with the revisions that were presented this evening.

There being no further comments, the special meeting was adjourned at 8:20 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

P. Michael Coll  
Borough Secretary